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A Pillar in the Temple

A SERMON

Preached in S. Mark's Church, Philadelphia, November 24, 1906

IN MEMORY OF

The Rt. Rev. Isaac Lea Nicholson, D.D.

Former Rector of the Parish

BY

THE REV. GEORGE MCCLELLAN FISKE, D. D.

Rector of S. Stephen's, Providence, R. I.,

and

Assistant Minister of S. Mark's, 1880-1883

A Pillar in the Temple.

"Him that overcometh, will I make a Pillar in the Temple (Sanctuary) of my God." (Rev. iii, 12.)

These words are from the Epistles to the Seven Churches, in particular, from the Epistle to the Church in Philadelphia.

To the Bishop of that ancient Philadelphia of the East, came this message from the Bishop of Bishops. In the light of its blessed praise and promise, let us think, here and now, of one who went forth from this Philadelphia of the West, in these last days, to be a Bishop, an Apostle, an Angel of the Church of God. His name will always be a Philadelphia name. So long as this Parish of S. Mark's exists, his name will be cherished in the hearts of its people. So long as this fair building stands, its courts of sacred beauty will be redolent with the fame and the memory of the fifth Rector, who invests with perpetual glory the pages of your parochial history.

Who is it that is gone? The bare chronicle runs on this wise: Isaac Lea Nicholson was born in Baltimore, January 18, 1844. His education was received at S. Timothy's Hall, Catonsville, and S. John's College, Annapolis. For seven years he was in his father's banking-house, in Baltimore. Relinquishing lucrative worldly prospects to obey the call of the Holy Ghost to the Sacred Ministry, he entered Dartmouth College, from which he was graduated in 1869. His theological course was taken at the Theological Seminary of Virginia. In 1871, he received Deacon's Orders from Rt. Rev. Dr. Whittingham, the Bishop of Maryland, and a year later was ordained priest by Dr. Pinkney, Bishop-Coadjutor of Maryland. As Deacon, he served in S. Thomas', Hanover, N. H. From 1871 to 1875, he was assistant minister

of S. Paul's, Baltimore. From 1875 to 1879, he was Rector of the Church of the Ascension, Westminster, Maryland. In December, 1879, he became Rector of S. Mark's. On the Feast of S. Simon and S. Jude, 1891, he was consecrated in this Church, fifth Bishop of Milwaukee. He rested from his labors on October 29, 1906, the morrow of the fifteenth anniversary of his consecration.

But who is it that is gone? A Prince among men and Priests. I have known many men and many Priests, but in all my observation and acquaintance, I recall but one other, beside this one, to whom that characterization comes with instantaneous and overwhelming force, as the one and only word adequate and fit to express my feelings and impressions. 'A Prince has gone.'

As I stand here, the flood of Time recedes. More than six and twenty years roll back, and Nave and Aisles are filled with a congregation, different, in large proportion, from that which occupies them to-day. There are so many dear faces which I see in affectionate recollection, "loved long since and lost awhile." A look of eagerness and unusual attention overspreads the great throng. I have never seen a congregation on which, as a body, rested such an expression of absorbing interest. Before them, in the forenoon of his brief, but brilliant, career, stood, as one heard it daily, then, "The new Rector." A goodly man, in his youthful prime, towering above the people—a very "palm tree" in the House of God, he poured forth with as simple, unstudied and passionate earnestness as I have ever heard, the claims of the Faith and following of Christ and His Church.

It was my good fortune to be associated with Dr. Nicholson in ministering at this Altar for three years, coming here when the Rector had been only six months in that office. He had taken the Parish by storm. Everybody was stirred. This was not then—I doubt if it be now, or ever has been, an emotional Parish—nor is this community, certainly it was not then, with its staid, calm, Quaker tone, an emotional town. But the arousing was not merely emotional. It was a moral one. "Here is a man," people said to themselves, "most terribly in earnest. He believes what he says." And as they scanned his living,

they felt that it corresponded to his preaching. With an alluring world around him, with many of the world's gifts at his disposal, well-born, according to the world's most exacting standards, reared within the charmed circle of the so-called "best society," Dr. Nicholson was a *very* unworldly man. I think that he was absolutely unaffected by any of the "poms and vanities of this wicked world." He was utterly regardless of the world's judgment, or opinion, in things pertaining to Conscience and to God. He saw two things distinctly—the cancer of the world, the plague of every man's own heart, SIN, and the "PRECIOUS BLOOD, that cleanseth, from all sin." He was intent on these two facts—the Disease and the Cure. And as the house, swept and garnished, must be inhabited, as the soul, cleansed and pardoned, must be fed and nourished, he was accordingly devoted to the BLESSED SACRAMENT—as that by which "they who hunger and thirst after righteousness" must be filled.

Some may remember sermons on "He craved the Body of Jesus" and on "All such as be fat upon earth have eaten and worshiped." The last sermon of his which I ever listened to, was in my own Parish Church, two years ago, during the Session of the General Convention in Boston, from the text, "Gave us this day our daily bread." I hold that Bishop Nicholson was a *great* preacher. He was such, because of the compelling power of his preaching. There was an air of reality, of conviction and of certitude about it. Men who heard him, and the strongest and brainiest men gladly heard him, felt that it was the most serious of all serious matters on which he spoke. They felt him to be dealing with an affair of life and death. These sermons, whether oral or written, it mattered not, for he wrote exactly as he spoke, had no rhetorical embellishments. They were rugged, unrhythmical perhaps, with no special beauty of diction, composed of homely words and phrases, a tongue "understanded of the people"—not disdaining here and there, and now and then, some current expression, or idiom of the day. Reminding you, in the peculiar collocation of his sentences, now of Carlyle and now of Browning, yet without the confused, huddling verbal caravan of the one, or the veiled, obscure and occult meaning

of the other, this preacher had a forceful, unchiseled eloquence that was all his own. Rough-hewn, just as it came from the depths of his regenerated soul, he hurled out denunciation of sin; or, with that indescribable pathos in his voice, tremulous with sympathy and yearning for the erring, the ignorant, the penitent and the sad, he pleaded, expostulated, urged, encouraged, and consoled. He found his way into the consciences and hearts of his hearers. He was an impressionist in language, but he left more than pictures in human imaginations. He planted in them visions of a new life.

I suppose that no one would consider Dr. Pusey a model of literary style, as we do Newman. Yet, who can read one of Pusey's sermons without being profoundly moved by it. Dr. Nicholson's preaching produced, on me, much the same effect. He was, I know, a constant student and reader of Pusey's writings. And like Pusey, while he spoke in the speech of this world and, far more than Pusey, in the every-day terms of every-day men, his voice was one that came out of another world, as if he saw the truth, and knew what a mere, thin veil and shadow and vapour this life and this world are.

Dr. Nicholson's appearance in Philadelphia, and his Rectorship of S. Mark's, constitute an epoch in Anglo-Catholic history of this city and diocese. There are three Rectorships which stand out with particular distinctness in that history, viz: Dr. Odenheimer's, at S. Peter's; Dr. Batterson's, at S. Clement's; and Dr. Nicholson's, at S. Mark's. Dr. Odenheimer, by his bold establishment of the public devotional system in his ancient Parish, paved the way for a Churchmanship, which demanded a Church like this one. Dr. Batterson, by the teaching and practice which he introduced at S. Clement's, broke ground for the feet of the Cowley Fathers, and all the great following which they created. While Dr. Nicholson, by the position which he took at S. Mark's, giving full teaching, with moderate, yet Catholic, ritual, showed the essential unity of Church life, which, with or without ceremonial, was true to the Sacramental System. He commended the Catholic Religion to numbers of people who were suspicious of ritual, but yet had Catholic instincts. He

showed that the presentment of the Church, made in Parishes like S. Clement's, for example, was only the embodiment of the letter and spirit of the Prayer Book, and that the external aspect of what was seen and heard in such parishes was the logical, legitimate and historical setting of the principles of the Reformation. Dr. Nicholson's Rectorship and teaching were the occasion of a rapid and solid extension of Catholicity in Philadelphia. With tact and gentleness, as well as with skill and good learning, he brought Church people back and up to the ancient standards, of which this Parish, under its present erudite and accomplished Rector, is so complete and clear a witness and exponent to-day.

But not only did this Rector of S. Mark's excel as a public ecclesiastical and theological teacher, but he shone even more brightly as a Pastor. Philadelphia has seen and followed and loved and lamented many Pastors, but none nearer the ideal of the Good, the Beautiful Shepherd, the *Princeps Pastorum*, JESUS CHRIST, our Lord, than this one. He was a true Barnabas—"Son of Consolation," blending the unction and tenderness and loving-kindness which suggested to the Apostles the surname "Barnabas," with the personal majesty and beauty which made the heathen strangers think of Jupiter. How lovingly and faithfully he led and guided and fed his flock. How assiduous he was in all works of Mercy, Corporal and Spiritual! How pains-taking in providing for them regular opportunities of receiving the Bread of Life! The sick, the destitute, the afflicted, the aged, the unfortunate, shared in the healing power of his shadow, like S. Peter's, passing by. As a Confessor and Counsellor, how constant was his labour, and how blessed its result! He was the friend of all. In him the conscience-stricken, the fainting, the struggling, the weary, and the anxious could confide and safely trust. He was favourable to the simple and needy. Into his ever-open ear men and women and children poured their troubles and their sins, and he took all into his capacious heart. He advised them. He absolved them. He comforted them. He blessed them. He spoke to them in the name of the Lord, and Souls to whom he spoke, felt that the Lord had indeed

spoken, and that it was really the word of the Lord which they had heard. In this beautiful Church, the high and the low, the richest and the poorest, the exalted and the humble, met together, and they loved their Rector and their Pastor with equal fervor, for none, no matter who or what he was, felt that any other had more part in David than he had. He was the Pastor of *all*, loving and tending each with full and impartial affection.

Let me call up before you that sweet picture to be seen here every Friday morning, as he catechized and instructed the children of the Parish School. With the manner of a most loving father, with gentle and gracious words, he fed Christ's lambs. We can see that group before us clearly, the Shepherd and the little ones. He literally led the little flock through the green pastures of the Church, for I remember a series of his instructions, when he walked week by week with the children from one window to another, telling the story of each, explaining the events, and enforcing their lessons. The Pastoral Commission was never more beautifully illustrated. He was certainly a lover of souls. He had the spirit of Christ. His was a profound and vital piety. He was a man of prayer, of intercession. He was not only a teaching priest, he was a praying priest, manifesting the Spirit of the Eternal Priest and carrying all his people on his heart. And his prayers were answered. There were wonderful conversions during his Pastorate. Like Jacob with the Angel, he had power with God and man—and prevailed.

I have said that he was conspicuously unworldly. I repeat it. He was unspoiled by and unspotted from the world. And so he kept himself to the last. His personal and domestic habits were those of extreme simplicity. He was no lover of show and of splendor. His manner of life was strict. If he were ever habited in any outward magnificence, it was only in his character and office as the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts, as he ministered before the Lord in the Church. Dr. Nicholson was one of the truest gentlemen who ever breathed. By birth and life-long association, qualified to grace any company, he was utterly free from snobbery, affectation and "airs" of any sort. While he magnified his office, he never magnified himself. He was always the

same, never minding high things nor seeking them. No pride of purse or social rank intimidated him or overawed him in the slightest degree. He was, to the end of his days, the same ingenuous, artless, sincere and ardent nature, scorning pretence and ostentation, a plain and real man among men, "the servant of the servants of God."

With all his deep piety, Dr. Nicholson had no mawkish sentimentality. Two emphatic traits made anything like this impossible. One was his abundant common-sense, the other was his keen and overflowing sense of humour. He saw and grasped at once the salient and important features of a situation. He saw what ought to be and could be done. He did things. With promptness and energy, he proceeded to his purpose, never oblivious to the fact that a straight line is the shortest path from one point to another. And what his determination and directness could not accomplish, he perhaps smiled at, and instead of fretting, which, as the Psalmist reminds us, may only move one to do evil, he was amused. As an administrator and a man of affairs, his secular experience stood him in good stead, as it always does any clergyman who has it. It may have been partly due to his commercial training that Dr. Nicholson was such a thorough master of every department and detail of his work. With a staff of clergy and other workers, he never lost touch with any nook or corner of parochial activity. Curates, Vestry, Choir, Societies, Finances, all were under his watchful eye. Nothing escaped him. He knew everything that was going on. Yet, there was naught oppressive in his vigilance and knowledge. Each was left free to do his best in his own best way.

The Rector was a large-minded man. He showed this towards his fellow-workers, always generous to subordinates. He showed it in his teaching. He could make allowances for the divers moulds of mind, for temperaments and dispositions. He did not expect to turn out all his disciples exactly alike. He kept in view the great fact that there are many members in one body, and that all members have not the same office. He was a *great* Rector and a *great* Pastor, because among *many* good Pastors and good Rectors, he awoke in the minds of clergy and people,

fresh conceptions of what Parish Priests may be, and what they may do. He gave them a fresh and stimulating example of pastoral efficiency. He rose up, among his brethren and before the people, a Pillar in the Temple of God. I have never ceased to be thankful that I was close to him here for three years. These years, I say, unhesitatingly, I count the most valuable and profitable years in all my clerical life. I owe him a great debt of gratitude for what I gained and learned from him, and I am glad publicly to acknowledge it here. The inspirations, the suggestions, the impressions, the lessons, which I derived from him, from his spirit, from his methods, have been actualized, so far as in me lies, throughout these many years, and will continue so to be. His works have followed him, and they *will* follow him still, no less. He has had a great influence on me and my life, and this witness of mine is, no doubt, that of many another Priest. Yes, that twelve years' Rectorship of S. Mark's was a *great* Rectorship, not alone for what it did for this people, but for what it did in entering into Sacerdotal lives, both far and near. That Rectorship was a *great* one. More than this, it was a monumental Rectorship for this Diocese.

Dr. Nicholson entered this Diocese when party lines were tightly drawn, and when the opposing forces faced each other in battle array. He appeared on the morrow of a partisan victory. His presence on the field was that of a pacificator and a statesman. He made peace with honour, peace without compromise or humiliation on either side, peace without the least sacrifice of principle. His trumpet gave no uncertain sound. But what he brought about was one of the most beneficent events in the entire history of the Diocese of Pennsylvania. That event stands impersonated in the venerated and beloved Bishop of this Diocese. For he is over you and among you, as the gift, under God, of the wisdom, sagacity and foresight of the Fifth Rector of S. Mark's. And this great Diocesan work of his was the crowning proof of his qualification for that great office for which he was intended and prepared, and which was so soon to be laid upon him.

With the characteristics I have mentioned, it was not strange

that Isaac Lea Nicholson was destined to be prominent. He was, by the hand of God Himself, hewn and shaped to be a Pillar in the Sanctuary. His very presence was commanding. His personality prepossessed. People never had to *learn* to like him. They liked him at first sight. His manner had in it a certain paternal element. When he clasped your hand, and looked down upon you, it was not the accident of superior stature, nor of assumed patronage, nor the condescension of pride. It was the natural primacy, by Divine right, of "the man born to be King." It was the kindly affection of a great and lofty soul. He was a born leader, and people bowed and consented to that leadership irresistibly. Dr. Nicholson never *sought* preferment. It sought him. Hidden away in Maryland, first as curate in Baltimore, and then in his little rural Parish of Westminster, he was, early in his ministerial history, seriously considered as a fit successor to the illustrious DeKoven. Though not chosen, it was, I have always so understood, the attention which was drawn to him on this occasion which led to his election as Rector of this Parish. Coming here as a comparatively unknown quantity, it was found at once that not only had no mistake been made, but that a wonderful prize had been discovered.

Mr. Nicholson stood in a line of peculiarly gifted and distinguished men. Bishop Wilmer, Dr. Washburn, Mr. Mitchell, and Dr. Hoffman were, each in his own glory, stars of the first magnitude. It was soon evident that another star, "bright and particular," had been added to that constellation. His fame was soon spread abroad. There are few, if any, parochial positions in the American Church superior, from a human point of view, to that of the Rectorship of this Parish. The standing of the Parish and the remarkable abilities of its Rectors, have made them distinct figures in our National Church, so, when, in 1883, Dr. Nicholson was chosen to the Bishopric of Indiana, the announcement came as a grief to this Parish, but not as a surprise. He was marked for elevation. His characteristic modesty and strong sense of duty to this Parish led him to decline the office. But the day was only postponed, as everybody knew, when their head should be taken from them. Another offer of

honour came to him in the Presidency of Nashotah, which, though devoted to that great work, he also was constrained to decline. At last, in 1891, came to the Rector of S. Mark's the solemn and imperative summons to the closing work of his earthly life. The Diocese of Milwaukee was a mysteriously holy ground. It was a land of self-sacrifices and heroisms and martyrdoms. It was consecrated by the lives and deeds of Kemper and Armitage and Welles and Knight and DeKoven and Parker and Breck and Cole. It was the home of Nashotah and Racine and Kenosha and such sacred places. It was a land where the Cross had been firmly planted and where the Cross had been bravely borne. The *Via Dolorosa* had been traced and trodden on its soil. Dearly won as its triumphs had been, precious as were the blood and the death of its Saints, sweet as was the fragrance of their lives and memories, it was, from a mortal standpoint, a land of vexation, anxiety and confusion.

Unflinching and intrepid went forth this new chieftain in the glorious succession of those other choice spirits, from our Eastern coasts, who had watered that Wisconsin soil with their tears and with their blood. Bishop Nicholson, of course, went where others had laid foundations and where his predecessors had sown. His was not to be the glory of the pioneer. But he relaid foundations that seemed to have been cast down. He sowed again where previous seed-time had failed to yield a harvest. Of that fifteen years Episcopate, I cannot now speak particularly. I can only call your attention to it, as its report has gone out to the Church at large. It is the report of a *great* Episcopate, great in its mastery and solution of seemingly insoluble problems, great in its almost unparalleled replenishment of the ranks of the Sacred Ministry, great in its resuscitation and firm establishment of educational Institutions as Nashotah and Racine, great in its creation of order and unity, great in the magnetic attraction it exerted upon clergy and people. Yes, great in its espousal and championship of great and right and righteous causes. Yes, it has been a *great* Episcopate, which will tell forevermore on the life and fortunes of the American Catholic Church. He would have said: "The *Lord* hath done great things for us,

whereof we rejoice." Bishop Nicholson's Episcopate has been brilliant and noble and statesmanlike, and I firmly believe that it will stand out in the annals of the American Episcopate, a shining record of zeal, self-oblation, missionary enthusiasm, personal consecration, and administrative success. It will stand out as an imperishable structure of solid achievement.

There was one Bishop of our Church, the greatest, take him all in all, that our Church has ever seen, his, being the greatness of unalloyed genius, the second Bishop of New Jersey, George Washington Doane, to whom was given by one, who, I am reminded, shed lustre on this very Parish, as one of its clergy, the Rev. Dr. Mahan, the title of "The Great-hearted Shepherd." That appellation is graven on the tomb of Bishop Doane. It might be graven, with perfect truth, on the tomb of Bishop Nicholson. I will not hesitate to claim that same title as no less appropriate to the late Bishop of Milwaukee. Was he not, considering him as Pastor here, *your* Pastor, and, as Bishop of the Church of God, a "Great-hearted Shepherd?"

To show how the Bishop was estimated by the people among whom he lived, from the columns of the leading newspaper of his See-city, I take the following words, which seem to express the verdict of the entire public press:

"The death of Bishop Isaac Lea Nicholson entails a serious loss on the Diocese of Milwaukee, whose interests, spiritual and temporal, he for fifteen years served with Apostolic zeal and consummate executive ability. His concentration of purpose and tireless industry, his fixity of standards in matters of Creed and Discipline, combined with tact and practical shrewdness in controlling and promoting the temporal interests of his Diocese, made Bishop Nicholson, in essential regards, almost an ideal man for the Episcopal office. A Churchman of the older, and somewhat uncompromising order, and with a personality that conveyed an impression of the distinctly Sacerdotal type and character, Bishop Nicholson nevertheless had the abilities and aptitudes that would have won him success, and possibly eminence, in the Secular callings. All who fell within his immediate or personal influence, will testify that he had the gift,

as well as the art, of winning hearts, and his dignified, yet benign and gracious, presence was one to command and win the reverence due to his office. The Diocese of Milwaukee owes much to the high capacities and devoted labors of Bishop Nicholson, and he passes into its annals as one of its ablest heads."

My fellow-mourners, A splendid Personality has vanished from us. That word "Splendid" is not a word to be used carelessly, is not a word that we can give to many good people, not even many of the very best, but to Isaac Lea Nicholson is seems to belong, without the faintest sound of extravagance or exaggeration. There was a certain inherent splendour about the *man*. He was framed on a grander pattern than most of us. He was a Knightly character, such as might have glorified the stories of old romances and ancient wars, "tender and true." He was not only a man born to be King—he was a man born to be loved. And *he was* loved, as few men are. He was one who seemed shielded by the very simplicity and truth of his very being. "Without fear and without reproach," he could fight battles and attack foes which most men would avoid or flee from. He could go upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon he could tread under his feet. Like Sir Galahad, he could say:

"My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

This Pillar of the Sanctuary fell, literally, in the Sanctuary. Stricken in Nashotah Chapel, clad in the robes of his High-Priesthood, it seems as if a part of the fabric of the Church were lying in ruins. How often have you and I glanced up at that Majestic Pillar of the Temple, in love and admiration. It has fallen. The ruin seems complete. We are told by those who looked upon his body as it lay ready for the grave: "Seldom has disease wrought such a change, and while the face is peaceful, there is scarcely a feature by which it would be recognized as belonging to Bishop Nicholson." How strange the mystery of our nature! Great and splendid as this man was, he was called to sustain the awful greatness of Suffering. He drank

deeply of the Chalice of Gethsemane and Calvary. And making true that inspired declaration, "Thy loving correction shall make me great," he displayed the sublimest greatness of Patience in Suffering, of Joy in Adversity, of Surrender to God's Will, of Faith in God's Felicity.

Now he is gone from us into the unhindered, undisturbed, uninterrupted growth, the cleansing, refining, hallowing of the Life beyond the grave, into the region of Perpetual Light, into the Rest and Happiness and Peace of Paradise. There, while we wait to join him, let our love and thoughts abide. For him let our prayers be speeded.

The Splendour which has fascinated us shall return, augmented. Our eyes shall yet behold the Glory. This fallen, shattered Pillar shall be raised, to fall no more, nor ever again to be removed from its place. He shall go no more out. The fullness of the promise, "I will make him a Pillar in the Sanctuary of my God," is yet to come. Our text, after all, belongs only relatively, and in the way of anticipation, to the Past. It belongs to the Future. In him we found, in the Past, so much to admire and love. Oh! think of what we are yet to see in the day of his, and our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul. The Splendour and Glory of that beloved personality, we have not begun to know, for "I look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the World to come."

The half is not told, though I have spoken as I could. In *this* world, we shall meet none like him, and our life will be lonely without him. Our hearts will always guard the grave on Nashotah's green slope. Though it is far away, we shall visit it continually. You remember the sermon which Bishop Nicholson preached here seven years ago, "I sleep, but my heart waketh." He spoke in it of the Departed. It is what they do. It is what *he* does. It comes to one to-day, as what he would have us realize in the Communion of Saints—"Heart to heart, though far apart."